

# **Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Administration Committee**

## **Final Meeting Summary November 17, 1998**

*Approved December 14, 1998*

**Present:** Peter Bennett, Vice Chair, Greg Devereux, Representative Ruth Fisher, Tomio Moriguchi, Connie Niva, Patricia Notter, Senator Dino Rossi, Senator Valoria Loveland (Steering Committee member), Neil Peterson (Revenue Committee)

**Absent:** Doug Hurley, Chair, Bob Dilger, Peter Hurley, Ken Smith, Judie Stanton

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Vice Chair Peter Bennett called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. (Chairman Doug Hurley had a previous engagement out of town.) The committee reviewed and accepted the October 7 and October 14 meeting summary. Patricia Notter noted she should have been noted as in attendance at the October 14 meeting.

### **Discussion of Transportation Briefings**

The Committee meeting was held during lunch on a day of presentations to the full Commission. The presentations in the morning session addressed Public Opinions and Transportation Politics; Washington's Transportation Structures and Their Governance; and Transportation Needs and How They Are Determined.

The Vice Chair initiated the Committee meeting with a discussion of the morning presentations. Committee members expressed their impression that the speakers seemed expert and the transportation system was better than commonly thought. It was generally agreed that a public perception exists that government does not address transportation problems efficiently. The presentations led some to wonder if there was a disconnect between the public perception and the reality. It was noted that the speakers had only presented one side. It would be useful to hear speakers outline the alleged inefficiencies of the system to provide a more complete picture.

Committee members expressed interest in the workings of the project selection process. Some said the process had already improved significantly. In their view, at one time politics largely determined whether a project was done or not, but now the prioritization formula brings a certain amount of objectivity to the decision process. Some expressed the opinion that these objective criteria might prevent small, passionate groups from unduly influencing the process in their favor.

The Committee discussed whether it should review the prioritization process. A view was expressed that illuminating the process could help end the charges that it is done poorly. If warranted by the merits, expressing support for the prioritization process could do as much good as changing the process itself.

Some on the Committee suggested that the briefings underscored the need for solutions that were flexible enough to address the split within the state between rural and non-rural areas. Some expressed the opinion that in order for any solution to move through the state Legislature, it would need to be attractive to both the urban and rural areas of the state.

A general discussion ensued in which the following views were expressed. Providing the public with specific plans could help build support for transportation investments. If the perception that money will not be used efficiently is one of the major obstacles to building public support, providing a specific plan could help overcome this problem. Since the public has a limited appetite for specific details, it would require significant effort to tailor a message that frames the issue in appropriate terms. People need to hear that doing nothing has real costs. It would be helpful, however, if these costs could be put into terms that people could readily understand. For example, a suggestion was made that, instead of saying that the Puget Sound region lost more than \$2 billion in congestion delays over a certain period, it might be more effective to put the losses in terms of costs per person.

In general, many on the Committee felt more candid discussions could be held in the Committee setting than in meetings of the entire Commission.

### **Topics Identified for Future Committee Briefings**

The Committee discussed several issues it would like to explore in future Committee briefings. Members expressed interest in addressing questions about the permitting process, such as whether it would be possible to streamline the process and to institute “one-stop shopping” for environmental permitting issues.

The Committee adjourned at 1:15 p.m. to attend to the afternoon session of presentations to the full Blue Ribbon Commission.